NWX-US DEPT OF COMMERCE

Moderator: Kristina Barrett
September 4, 2019
9:00 am CT

Coordinator: Welcome and thank you for standing by. All lines have been placed on a

listen-only mode until the question and answer session. At that time, if you

would like to ask a question, you may press *1 and record your name. The call

is being recorded. If you have any objections, you may disconnect at this time.

I will now turn the call over to (Julie Iriondo). Thank you, you may begin.

(Julie Iriondo):   Thanks, (Shanida). This is (Julie Iriondo) from the Public Information Office

of the US Census Bureau. We are here for the webinar, which will explain and

answer questions related to the Current Population Survey, Annual Social and

Economic Supplement data processing changes.

Our speakers today from the Social Economic and Housing Statistics Division

are (David Waddington), Division Chief, (Trudi Renwick), Assistant Division

Chief, (Laryssa Mykyta), Health and Disabilities Statistics Branch Chief,

(Jonathan Rothbaum), Income Statistics Branch Chief, (Ashley Edwards),

Poverty Statistics Branch Statistician, (Liana Fox), Economic Characteristics

Branch Statistician, (Edward Berchick), Health and Disabilities Statistics

Branch Statistician.

We'll have a question and answer session following the presentation. Please begin, (Trudi).

(Trudi Renwick): Thank you. Welcome, and thank you all for joining us today. My name is (Trudi Renwick). I am the Assistant Division Chief for Economic Characteristics in the Social Economic and Housing Statistics Division at the Census Bureau.

The main purpose of today's webinar is to prepare you, our data users, for the upcoming release of the income poverty and health insurance results from 2018. These data are scheduled for release on September 10th, 2019.

Estimates for both 2017 and 2018 in these reports will use data from the current population survey annual social and economic supplement, or the CPS ASEC, processed using our updated system.

I'm going to start with a brief background on the redesign of the CPS ASEC and the subsequent updates to our processing system. After the background, I will present some estimates that highlight the effect of system changes on characteristics of interest. I will wrap up by discussing some of our outreach efforts to date.

The Census Bureau does not make changes lightly. We value the time series and appreciate the public need to compare key characteristics over time. However, in order to best capture changes in the current environment and incorporate statistical advances, from time to time, we need to redesign certain aspects of our survey.

The CPS ASEC redesign was purposeful and successful. Updated statistical methods improved the measurement of income, poverty, health insurance, and family relationships.

The redesign questionnaire and the updated processing system provide more detailed information about defined contribution retirement plans, health insurance coverage purchased from a health insurance marketplace, like healthcare.gov, and health insurance coverage at the time of the interview.

The current redesign has been implemented over a series of years. The first stage included key changes to improve the data collection. In the 2014 survey, the CPS ASEC included redesigned health insurance questions for the full sample.

In the 2015 survey, the CPS ASEC included redesigned income questions for the full sample. In the 2017 survey, the CPS included updated relationship categories and related questionnaire changes for the full sample. The second stage included key changes to processing of the survey.

Here are some of the key improvements we made to income and health insurance processing. Let me provide a few more details about some of these changes, but there will be time at the end of the presentation to take questions and dive deeper into any of these particular topics.

For example, for income, we are now able to use earning ranges to impute missing data. We ask our respondents, "What did you earn in your primary job last year?" Since the 2014 questionnaire redesign, if the respondent is unable or unwilling to give us a precise dollar amount, we follow up with a series of ranges.

"Could you tell me if you earned one of these three categories: less than $45,000? 45 to 60? 60 or above?" We found that about 70 percent of people who didn't answer the earnings question did provide a range during the follow up.

Similar follow up questions were added each time we asked respondents for a dollar amount for any income source. However, since the traditional questionnaire did not include ranges, the legacy processing system was not able to use this information to impute missing values.

With the new processing system, we are able to use this valuable information to impute an income amount within the range reported. There are similar improvements on the health insurance side.

In the legacy processing system, if a person had missing information about health insurance coverage, each type of potential insurance coverage was imputed independently for each person in the household. Research showed that this resulted in more people having multiple types of coverage.

The new processing systems groups people in a household together, based on whether they are likely to have the same coverage type. If all people in the group are missing information, then the new system imputes health insurance coverage information to all people as a group.

Okay, this chart shows a time series for real median household income. Notice that for 2013, there are two estimates. Income did a split sample in the 2014 survey. Part of the sample got the traditional questions. Part of the sample got the redesigned questions.

Both are shown in the time series. The 2013 estimate, based on the traditional questions, is comparable to the estimates prior to the change. The 2013 estimate based on the redesigned questions is comparable to the following years.

This chart shows the 2016 and 2017 estimates, surveys from 2017 and 2018, edited two ways. The red line shows the estimates using the legacy processing system. The blue line shows the estimates edited with the redesign processing. Because the estimates of median income with the two different processing systems are close, it's hard to see both on this scale.

Estimates for 2018 will be exclusively from the new processing system. This table presents additional details for 2017 household income, using the legacy and updated processing systems. The estimates in the legacy column are the estimates we published last September.

The estimates in the updated column are the estimates for 2017 that will appear in next week's report, and will be used to make year to year comparisons with the 2018 estimates. Here, you can see that the two estimates for median household income for all households are not statistically different from each other.

Looking across different population groups, three groups do have statistically different median household incomes when using the new processing system. The effect of the processing system changes were different for other points on the income distribution. This table shows household income at the 95th percentile.

For all households, the 95th percentile income was $237,000 in the legacy processing system and $244,000 in the updated processing system. This 2.9

percent difference is likely the result of higher top codes for many income sources in the updated system.

The next two charts compare official poverty and supplemental poverty estimates for 2017 across the two processing systems. For official poverty, there were no statistical differences in the poverty rates for all people, people under 18, and people 18 to 64.

The poverty rates for people 65 and over was higher using the updated processing system, compared with the legacy system. The supplemental poverty measure was lower using the updated system than the legacy system for the total population, and for each of the major age groups.

This chart shows a time series for CPS ASEC's estimates of the uninsured. As you can see, this is a little more complicated than the income series. We began measuring health insurance coverage in CPS ASEC in 1988, publishing estimates for coverage in 1987.

Research had shown that the uninsured rate was higher than other sources of data, so starting in the 2000 survey, reference year 1999, if a person reported no health insurance coverage, they were asked a direct follow up question to verify their answer.

The two estimates for 1999 demonstrate that a number of people who had not originally reported coverage then reported the source of their coverage when asked the follow up question. The higher estimate for 1999 shows what the uninsured rate would have been without the verification question.

After extensive research and testing, a set of redesigned health insurance questions were fully implemented in 2014, so there's only one estimate for calendar 2013, and that estimate uses the redesigned questions.

Finally, this chart shows two sets of estimates for 2016 and 2017, based on data from the 2017 and 2018 CPS ASEC data collection. The green line includes the estimates as originally published, processed using the legacy system.

The blue line shows the estimates processed with the redesigned system. This is a 2017 estimate that will be used in the report next week, to measure year to year changes in health insurance coverage. For historical time trends from 2008 to the present, we recommend using the American Community Survey.

This figure shows the results using the updated processing system, and that they differ statistically from the legacy processing system at the national level for the uninsured rate representing no coverage at any time during the calendar year, and for the percentage of people with any coverage at any time, even if only for a short time during the calendar year.

This figure shows the estimates from the updated processing system differ from the legacy processing system for all subtypes of health insurance coverage. For those interested in the details, we have a table posted online earlier this year, that shows the point estimates for public and private coverage and for specific subtypes of coverage.

These differences represent improvements to data quality, aligning estimates of health insurance coverage with other national surveys. As such, estimates using the updated processing system should not be compared with those using the legacy processing system.

The Census Bureau has made an effort to engage its data users in this process. Presentations have been made at a number of conferences. In May 2019, the bureau hosted an expert meeting at its headquarters to discuss the impact of the changes.

Materials for many of these presentations, working papers, and several tables as well as a video of the expert meeting are available on our website. In April, the Census Bureau re-released a rerun of 2018 CPS ASEC public use data, using the updated processing system.

Public use microdata files, a data dictionary, and supplemental technical documentation are available on the Census Bureau website. Similar resources were released in January for the 2017 CPS ASEC. The appendices of our reports will include an analysis of the impact and the changes, as well as links to the research files and other documentation.

Today, we are releasing a research matters blog that includes much of the material included in today's webinar, and a set of detailed tables. Just to reiterate, next week's income and poverty - income poverty and health insurance reports will include 2017 and 2018 estimates using the updated processing system.

These estimates may differ from the estimates for 2017 published last September. The CPS ASEC redesign has improved the quality of our data on income, poverty, health insurance, and family relationships.

We are also able to provide some new measures, such as income flows from defined contribution retirement plans and more detailed information about types of military coverage and whether plans were purchased through a state

or federal marketplace. Alright, we would now like to open the telephone lines for questions.

Coordinator: Thank you. We will now begin our question and answer session. If you would like to ask a question, please press *1 and record your first and last name. One moment for our first question. Our first question comes from (Catherine Roberts). (Catherine), you may begin.

(Catherine Roberts):   Yes, I've been following this, and I'm just wondering what this has to do with us going door to door and taking the census. We're not asking those questions. So, what is all this data for, fascinating as it may be? I understood that the government - that the courts - that the government can't ask all those questions about households, so what does this got to do with it?

(Julie Iriondo):   (Jasmine), this is a - this is (Julie Iriondo) from the Public Information Office. Please give our office a call, and I'm happy to talk it over with you. Our extension is 3030, thank you.

(Catherine Roberts): Okay.

Coordinator: And at this time, I show no further questions on the phone lines. Again, if you would like to ask a question, please press *1. Our next question comes from (Rodell Williams). (Rodell), your line is open. You may ask your question.

(Rodell Williams): Hi. I noticed the research files that you published for 2018 and 2017 were published in, like, a SAS format. Is this data going to be released as it has been traditionally, or will there also be perhaps an updated SAS or SPSS-type compatible format?

(Trudi Renwick): Why don't you give us a call, and we can make sure you get it in a format that you can use? I believe we have a Stata version and a SAS version, and an ASCII version, and a CSV version as well.

(Rodell Williams): Great, thank you.

Coordinator: Our next question comes from (David Gross). (David), your line is open.

(David Gross): Hello. Just wanted to check on that slide that you had with the supplemental poverty measure, comparisons by age. If you could go back there, thank you? Just wanted to check on that, for those differences which were all significant - statistically significant, if you have some reasonings on why those particular items differed between the two methods.

(Liana Fox): Hi, (David). This is (Liana Fox). So, in the supplemental poverty measure reporting, the appendices kind of talked about it. The three main things were we've changed some of the caps for the means tested benefits.

So, housing subsidies moved fewer - moved more people out of poverty than it did in the previous - the legacy processing system. Also, we see that federal income taxes and medical expenses pushed fewer people into poverty. So, those are the three main things that changed.

(David Gross): Okay, thank you for that.

Coordinator: And our next question comes from (Jeff). (Jeff), your line is open.

(Jeff): Hi, thank you. I was wondering when the blogpost was going to be live. It's not up currently, and/or will these slides be shared with us?

(Julie Iriondo):   This is (Julie Iriondo) from the Public Information Office. The blog will be up
                     following the webinar.

(Jeff):   Thank you.

Coordinator: And at this time, I show no further questions on the phone lines. Again, if you
                     would like to ask a question, please press *1.

(Julie Iriondo):   While we're waiting, I'd like to remind people that, on September 10th at
                     10:00 am, the Census Bureau is scheduled to hold an online news conference
                     to announce the findings for the National 2018 income poverty and health
                     insurance coverage and supplemental poverty measure.

                     If you have questions about this, please reach out to our Public Information
                     Office at (301) 763-3030, or by email at PIO@census.gov. Operator, do we
                     have anyone else in the queue?

Coordinator: At this time, I show no further questions on the line.

(Julie Iriondo):   Okay, that concludes our webinar for today. We appreciate everyone for
                     joining. And again, if you have any questions, please reach out to the Public
                     Information Office at (301) 763-3030 or by email at PIO@census.gov. Thank
                     you for joining us.

Coordinator: That does conclude today's conference. Thank you all for participating. You
                     may now disconnect.

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